# THE UNITED NATIONS AND DISABLED PERSONS

UNITED NATIONS

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## UNITED NATIONS ASSISTANCE TO PERSONS WHO ARE DISABLED

More than half a billion persons are disabled world-wide and approximately 80 per cent of the world's disabled population live in developing countries.

This is a situation that should concern all of us. Unless outside assistance is forthcoming, most persons with disabilities will be required to endure a lifetime of isolation and oppression. It is a situation that can be called a "silent emergency".

The United Nations, through its social and humanitarian programmes, has a long history of working to improve conditions for persons who are disabled.

## DECLARATION ON RIGHTS OF DISABLED PERSONS

The United Nations is strongly committed to assisting the world's disabled community. In 1971, the General Assembly adopted the "Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons". This Declaration states that mentally retarded persons have the same rights as other human beings, including:

- the right to proper medical care, economic security, rehabilitation and training;
- the right to live with one's own family or with foster parents.

The Assembly further declared that there must be legal safeguards against any form of abuse should there be instances where the rights of mentally retarded persons may have to be restricted or denied.

In 1975 the General Assembly adopted the "Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons", which proclaims that disabled persons have the same civil and political rights as other human beings. This Declaration provides for equal treatment and services that would develop to the maximum the capabilities of persons with disabilities, while hastening their social integration or reintegration.

## INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF DISABLED PERSONS

In a further statement of concern, the General Assembly in 1976 proclaimed 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP) and called for a plan of action for the Year at the national, regional and international levels, with an emphasis on equalization of opportunities, rehabilitation and the prevention of disabilities.

The theme and purpose of the Year were "full participation and equality", defined as the right of persons with disabilities:

- to take part fully in the life and development of their societies;
- to enjoy living conditions equal to those of other citizens;
- to have an equal share in improved conditions resulting from socio-economic development.

Other objectives of the Year included increasing public awareness, understanding and acceptance of persons who are disabled and encouraging persons with disabilities to form organizations through which they could effectively express their views and call for action to improve their situations.

The Year's activities clearly developed a greater awareness of the problems, needs and capabilities of persons with disabilities, while at the same time determining the dimension and complexity of disability issues. They also indicated that the image of persons with disabilities depends on social attitudes, which may be the greatest barrier to the realization of their goals of full participation and equality.

## WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION CONCERNING DISABLED PERSONS

A major outcome of the 1981 International Year of Disabled Persons was the formulation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, adopted by the General Assembly in December 1982.

The World Programme of Action is a global strategy to prevent disability, enhance rehabilitation and provide for the full participation of persons with disabilities in social life and development. It explicitly recognizes the right of all human beings to equality of opportunities, in effect extending the concept of human rights.

The World Programme is a declaration of principles and guidelines for national, regional and international action. Its three chapters include:

- an analysis of principles, concepts and definitions relating to disabilities;
- an overview of the world situation regarding persons with disabilities;
- recommendations for action at the national, regional and international levels.

"Equalization of opportunities" is the underlying theme of the World Programme and its guiding philosophy for the achievement of full participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of social and economic life. An important principle is that issues concerning persons with disabilities should be treated not in isolation but within the context of the services that are offered to the entire population.

## UN DECADE OF DISABLED PERSONS, 1983-1992

In order to provide an initial timeframe during which Governments and organizations could implement the recommended activities of the World Programme of Action, the General Assembly proclaimed the period 1983 to 1992 as the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons.

In countries where the will and commitment is strong, Governments, service agencies, business and industry and other organizations have worked with the disabled community to institute changes. With this united effort, significant progress has been made.

This type of expected progress has not, unfortunately, been universal. In some areas, progress has been limited, and in many of the developing areas, the situation facing disabled persons has remained unchanged.

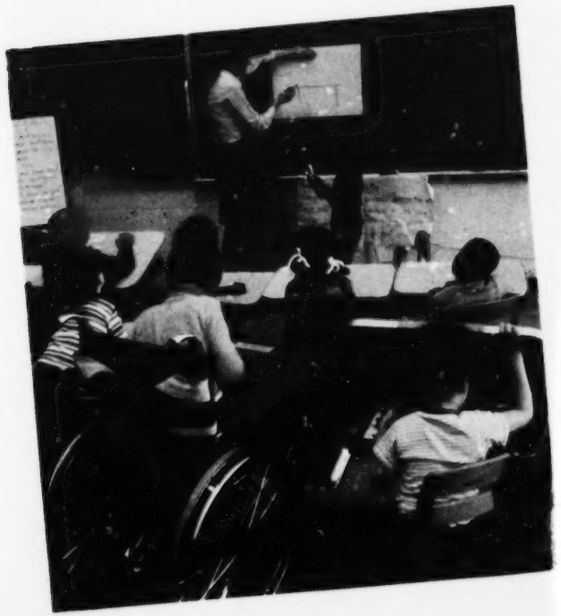
## TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION AND THE VOLUNTARY FUND FOR THE UN DECADE OF DISABLED PERSONS

The United Nations encourages multilateral assistance as well as bilateral aid to developing countries for disability-related work and co-ordinates such activities by bringing worth-while project proposals to the attention of donor countries.

The Voluntary Fund for the UN Decade of Disabled Persons, originally called the Trust Fund for the International Year of Disabled Persons, was established by the General Assembly in 1978 to support the observance of IYDP in 1981. It provides support to Governments and organizations for catalytic and innovative projects to promote the implementation of the World Programme of Action. Priority is given to project proposals from least developed countries.

The Voluntary Fund provides "seed" monies which on average have yielded a fourfold multiplier effect. From the time it became operational in 1980 to June 1988, the Fund financed 93 projects.

Increasing concern has been expressed regarding the need for more contributions to the Voluntary Fund in order for it to keep pace with the growing demand for assistance. Governments, non-governmental organizations, foundations, businesses and individuals can make financial contributions to the Fund for general support of activities assisted by the Fund or for earmarked, specific purposes which are consistent with its terms of reference.





## CENTRE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS: FOCAL POINT ON DISABILITY ISSUES

The United Nations Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, in the United Nations Office at Vienna, is the focal point within the UN system on matters relating to disability. In addition to disability issues, the Centre oversees and co-ordinates activities related to crime prevention and criminal justice, social development and social welfare, youth, aging and women.

The Centre's Disabled Persons Unit is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the World Programme of Action. In addition, the Centre:

- prepares publications and acts as a clearing-house for information on disability issues;
- promotes national, regional and international programmes and activities;
- provides guidance to Governments and non-governmental organizations;
- gives substantive support to technical co-operation projects and activities.

The United Nations Statistical Office also plays an important role through the collection of data and in the preparation of technical manuals and publications on disability statistics.

In order better to co-ordinate and streamline its work, the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs closely collaborates with major international non-governmental organizations dealing with disability issues and supports technical co-operation activities which are jointly prepared with them. In addition, the Centre organizes or collaborates in international expert meetings.

The Tallinn Guidelines for Action on Human Resources Development in the Field of Disability were developed at one such meeting of experts and representatives from organizations of disabled persons.

## OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE

Following the 1987 Global Meeting of Experts to Review the Implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons at the Mid-Point of the Decade, the United Nations Secretary-General appointed a Special Representative for the Promotion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons.

The Special Representative, based in Vienna, carries out activities to increase awareness of the Decade and the World Programme of Action, as well as to increase support for the Voluntary Fund for the UN Decade of Disabled Persons, used for projects of direct benefit to disabled persons in developing countries.

## PUBLICATIONS

Copies of the following publications are available from the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs:

- Disabled Persons Bulletin (issued three times each year)
- World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons
- Disability: Situation, Strategies and Policies
- Manual on the Equalization of Opportunities for Disabled Persons
- Guidelines for Workshops on the Equalization of Opportunities for Disabled Persons
- Designing with Care: A Guide to Adaptation of the Built Environment for Disabled Persons
- Co-operatives of Disabled Persons: A Guide for the Promotion and Organization of Co-operatives of Disabled Persons
- Improving Communications about People with Disabilities
- Development of Statistics of Disabled Persons: Case Studies
- Guidelines for Action on Human Resources Development in the Field of Disability

**For further information as well as information concerning contributions to the Voluntary Fund, please contact:**

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42 05 44 (INTL)

Published by the United Nations Department of Public Information
DPI/1046—40563—July 1990—25M